

‘A Weariness of the Flesh’: Towards a Theology of Boredom and Fatigue

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Introduction

It may seem odd – perverse even – to include an essay on boredom and fatigue in a book subtitled the ‘affirmation of life’. And yet they are part of our everyday lives¹: fatigue, as Jean-Louis Chrétien has suggested, is one of the fundamental phenomena of existence, implicating not only a person’s work and body, but its temporality, death, meaning and being.² And while English-speaking commentators may contend that the word ‘boredom’ is an invention of the nineteenth century (a product of either the Enlightenment or Romanticism), they also acknowledge that the French *ennui* ‘in all its metaphysical dignity’ originated in the twelfth century.³

French studies of boredom are certainly more elegiac, perhaps because they associate boredom with depression⁴ – what the poet Baudelaire called ‘the planes of *Ennui*, vacant and profound’. At the start of the twentieth century French philosophy exhibited a divided and dialectical character: a philosophy of life on the one hand, a philosophy of the concept on the other. At stake, Alain Badiou suggests, was the human subject as a ‘living organism’ and ‘creator of concepts’ with both its ‘interior, animal,

¹ Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Présence et parousie* (Genève: Ad Solem, 2006), p. 317.

² Jean-Louis Chrétien, *De La Fatigue* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1996).

³ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 9, 14.

⁴ Peter Toohey, *Boredom: A Lively History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 201. Cf. Bernard Granger and Georges Charbonneau (eds), *Phénoménologie des sentiments corporels: II – Fatigue, lassitude, ennui* (Puteaux: Le cercle herméneutique, 2003). My thanks here to Agnes Chalier.

organic life,’ and ‘capacity for creativity and abstraction’ under scrutiny.⁵ As Badiou observes, this ‘relationship between body and idea, or life and concept, formulated around the question of the subject, thus structures the whole development’ of twentieth-century French philosophy.⁶

Indeed, Jean-Luc Marion argues that the supernatural boredom which ‘turns the spiritual away from the good ... away from charity’⁷ also ‘undoes being from its very beingness’ and ‘abolishes the very name of being’.⁸ Conversely, rather than this disengagement of ontological difference, Emmanuel Levinas observed that fatigue is ‘not a cancellation of one’s contract with being’⁹ but the opportunity for an ‘interrogation of being’.¹⁰ Instead, understood as ‘some lapse or diminishment in our capacity to go on’¹¹ fatigue is probably our most common form of experience, one which happens so frequently and closely to humanity that it can often escape proper reflection and understanding.

Such familiarity, I suggest, has though, until recently, bred philosophical neglect, while in theology the very idea that God might be something we are tired of – or even bored by – seems blasphemous. Indeed, as the phenomenologist and theologian

⁵ Alain Badiou, ‘The Adventure of French Philosophy’, *New Left Review* 35 (2005): p. 69.

⁶ Ibid., p. 69.

⁷ Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), p. 135.

⁸ Ibid., p. 120.

⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001), p. 25.

¹⁰ Chrétien, *De La Fatigue*, p. 12.

¹¹ Jeffrey Bloechl, ‘The difficulty of being: A partial reading of E. Lévinas, *De l’existence à l’existant*’, *European Journal of Psychotherapy, Counselling and Health* 7:1-2 (2005): p. 78.

Jean-Yves Lacoste notes, in the history of ideas what was usually referred to as wisdom was in fact the ‘life of the mind’ or the ‘vitality of the spirit’. By contrast, Lacoste continues, fatigue is often defined as *failure*, a closing off of ourselves from the world.¹² Theological claims that the God to whom humanity prays is tirelessly¹³ concerned with the world come to naught if I am so bored that I cannot pray well, or if I am so tired that I cannot pray at all.

This essay will thus follow two impulses: Lacoste’s suggestion that philosophy and theology should speak about boredom and about fatigue, just as they do about anguish or joy, and the Swiss theologian Karl Barth’s contention that theological anthropology and philosophy of religion are incoherent without them. Above all, it will try and offer a tentative answer to the question as to what it means to pray when one is tired or bored. To this end, I shall begin by examining some of the traditional theological and philosophical readings of fatigue and boredom (beginning with Jewish and Christian scripture), before turning specifically to Martin Heidegger and Giorgio Agamben, and finally to recent phenomenological accounts, drawing from them some suggestions for a possible theology of boredom and fatigue.

The Theological Status of Fatigue and Boredom

Both Thomas Aquinas¹⁴ and the desert fathers understood the dangers of apathy [*accidia*], or a lack of interest in spiritual matters. But while the author of Ecclesiastes offered a warning to every theologian that ‘of making books there is no end, and much

¹² Lacoste, *Présence et parousie*, p. 311.

¹³ Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, ‘On unceasing prayer’, trans. William Morlock, *Communio*, 4/2 (1977): pp. 99-113.

¹⁴ *Summa Theologica* II/2, q.35, art.4, ‘Reply to objection 3.’ Cited in Michael L. Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), p. 177.

study is a weariness of the flesh',¹⁵ the biblical witness is for the most part silent on the topic of boredom,¹⁶ with the prophet Isaiah (Is. 40: 28-31) typifying scriptural attitudes to fatigue. The Gospels at least offer some solace for weary souls (and theologians a space for contemplation and investigation¹⁷) revealing that even the incarnate God was himself tired from his journey (John 4:6). Elsewhere the Gospels record a specific type of boredom, arising from a jadedness born of excess and repetition (or what Svendsen terms the 'boredom of satiety'¹⁸): is this what befalls the disciples in Mark 14: 32-42 as Christ prays in the Garden of Gethsemane?

As scriptural commentary, Lo Spagna's painting of *The Agony in the Garden* (1500-1505) certainly gives that impression: it depicts three drowsy disciples, their heads resting on their forearms (a position which Toohey considers 'a sign of boredom'¹⁹). Now, the disciples ought not to be bored and sleepy – they ought to be 'full of attention and prayerful devotion. But they have had enough of their Easter service and this terrible garden. Their dereliction ... is expressed as boredom with the travails of their Saviour'²⁰ and Toohey applauds Lo Spagna's genius in adding 'this boredom to the usual depiction' of the sleepy disciples in Gethsemane.

Now, as evocative as this is, it is probably an exegetical stretch. More damning is an incident from the career of the Apostle Paul (who commands us to pray unceasingly in 1 Thessalonians) in which we learn that a young man, Eutychus, sank

¹⁵ Ecclesiastes 12:12.

¹⁶ Although Proverbs 31:27 describes an ideal wife as one who 'avoids the bread of idleness'.

¹⁷ Chrétien, *De La Fatigue*, p. 13.

¹⁸ Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, trans. John Irons (London: Reaktion, 2005), p. 41.

¹⁹ Toohey, *Boredom*, p. 13.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

‘into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on’ until, ‘sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third storey ... dead’²¹. This, one might suggest, is the first recorded incident in the history of the Christian church in which a member of the congregation is bored to death by the preaching; a cautionary tale of a preacher who drones on until the service becomes an all-nighter and ‘vespers has turned into a lock-in.’²² No wonder then, that it is usually passed over by embarrassed Biblical commentators.²³

Echoing the author of Ecclesiastes, in his commentary on Paul’s *Letter to the Romans*, Karl Barth talked about the flourishing business of sin with ‘the publication of books such as the one I am now writing’.²⁴ For Barth, writing in the wake of the First World War, ‘the signature of modern man’ seemed to consist ‘simply and unfortunately in his utter weariness and boredom ... man is bored with himself’.²⁵ Modern man, Barth avers, ‘can no longer work up any interest in himself, or give himself to the stimuli and disillusionments of seeking and self-transcendence’. He thus reacts ‘neither positively nor negatively to his experience, however intense’ and is incapable ‘of the joys of faith or of the fierceness of atheistic defiance. Everything has become a burden to him. He has attained only to the indifference which lets things take their course’. For Barth such

²¹ Acts 20:7-12.

²² Anna Carter Florence, ‘A Prodigal Preaching Story and Bored-to-Death Youth’, *Theology Today*, 64/2 (2007): p. 238.

²³ Those that do normally skip to Eutychus’ resurrection, glossing over the fact that Paul was at least partly culpable. One of the few references to this incident notes, archly, that ‘If this was not his first and his only sermon at Troas, it was certainly his last.’ Alexander Whyte, *Bible Characters: Stephen to Timothy* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1901), p. 43.

²⁴ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 174.

²⁵ Karl Barth, trans. Harold Knight et al, *Church Dogmatics* III/2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), p. 117.

lethargy was ‘a pressing reality’ in post-war Europe; the ‘fateful question’ was whether Europe would succeed ‘in shaking [it] off’.²⁶

His study of human phenomena in part leads Barth to the rejection of the existential thought that characterised his early theology²⁷: here ‘the religious interpretation of human life obviously reaches its limit’. Boredom is immanence in ‘its purest form’²⁸. Yet the assertion that human life is related to transcendence:

presupposes that man is interested in himself, that he is not weary of himself but in search of his true self ... [I]s it fair to take account of the enthusiasm which is able either to affirm or to deny the mystery suggested, but to ignore the lethargy which may also be a reaction in this situation, leaving out of account the tired and indifferent man, as though there could be no place for him too, and for him precisely, in a coherent anthropology?²⁹

²⁶ Ibid., p. 117.

²⁷ Cf. Stephen H. Webb, *Re-figuring Theology: The Rhetoric of Karl Barth* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 153. However, the French ‘theology of work’ which emerged in the 1950s amounted to little more than a ‘theology of pious consciousness’ that ignored pressing socio-ethical problems; the papal encyclical *Laborem exercens* recognised only that man rest in order to ‘prepare himself, becoming more and more what in the will of God he ought to be’. *On Human Work* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1981), p. 25. See Lothar Roos, ‘On a theology and ethics of work’, trans. Albert K. Wimmer, *Communio*, 11/2 (1984): pp. 100-119.

²⁸ Svendsen, *Philosophy of Boredom*, p. 47.

²⁹ Barth continues: ‘Is not this unfairness a further indication that it is not quite correct to maintain that the frontier situation is laden with transcendence or that this is genuine transcendence? Is it not a further indication of the highly problematical nature of the main principle of this philosophy?’ *Church Dogmatics* III/2, pp. 117-8.

And not just existentialist philosophy; systematic theology itself, Barth suggested, was ‘the turning over of a sick man in his bed for the sake of change’.³⁰ What one generation found interesting will likely bore the next;³¹ as Stephen Webb notes, theology, ‘because it must speak from the emptiness of human life, is always seeking something new to say, a newness that Barth suggests can only barely cover up its profound *ennui*’.³² Even the relatively mundane activity of weekly preaching falters: ‘The people do not need us to help them with the paraphernalia [appurtenances] of their daily life’, writes Barth,³³ thus exposing the embarrassing conceptual myopia behind Schleiermacher’s definition of religion as a ‘taste for the infinite’ or a ‘feeling of ultimate dependence’ [*Gefühl schlechthinniger Abhängigkeit*] which has plagued the philosophy of religion ever since.

The Temporality of Boredom

Similar sentiments were echoed by Edmund Husserl, writing in 1936 that ‘the exclusiveness with which the total world-view of modern man, in the second half of the nineteenth century, let itself be determined by the positive sciences and be blinded by the “prosperity” they produced, meant an indifferent turning-away from the questions which are decisive for a genuine humanity’.³⁴ Barth’s comments were directed in part at

³⁰ Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), p. 184.

³¹ Jacques Ellul identified boredom – ‘gloomy, dull, and joyless’ – as one of the defining perversions of modern social life. *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective*, trans. Cecilia Gaul Kings (London: SCM Press, 1970), p. 121.

³² Webb, *Re-figuring Theology*, p. 134.

³³ Barth, *Word of God and the Word of Man*, p. 187.

³⁴ Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), pp. 5-6.

Husserl's pupil, Martin Heidegger. While the phenomenological analysis which Heidegger had offered in *Being and Time* had centred on anxiety, in his winter semester 1929-30 lecture course it was replaced by boredom as the basic mood of *Dasein*. Boredom here means literally a 'long while' [*Langeweile*] and, Heidegger asks, 'who is not acquainted with it in the most varied forms and disguises in which it arises, in the way it often befalls us only for a moment, the way it torments and depresses us for longer periods too'.³⁵

This German term conveys the temporal aspect of the experience, one in which 'the imagination is crucified';³⁶ if time does become intolerably 'long' for *Dasein*³⁷ then it tries to drive that time and its boring character away with petty distractions. *Dasein* simply does not wish to experience a 'long time':

Such boredom is still distant when it is only this book or that play, that business or this idleness, that drags on and on. It irrupts when "one is bored". Profound boredom, drifting here and there in the abysses of our existence like a muffling fog, removes all things and human beings and oneself along with them into a remarkable indifference. This boredom manifests beings as a whole.³⁸

³⁵ Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 79.

³⁶ Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*, p. 40.

³⁷ As Agamben observes, Heidegger's *locus classicus* is that of waiting on a railway platform. Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 63; Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p. 101.

³⁸ 'No matter how fragmented our everyday existence may appear to be, however, it always deals with beings in a unity of the "whole," if only in a shadowy way. Even and precisely when we are not actually busy with things or ourselves, this "as a whole" comes over us – for example, in authentic boredom.'

Heidegger asks how might ‘we escape this boredom, in which we find, as we ourselves say, that *time* becomes drawn out, becomes long?’ His response is simply ‘by at all times making an effort, whether consciously or unconsciously, to pass the time, by welcoming highly important and essential preoccupations for the sole reason that they take up our time.’³⁹ Heidegger, like Kierkegaard and Pascal, considered boredom to be a fundamental human ‘attunement’⁴⁰ with ‘profound metaphysical, if not explicitly religious, significance’.⁴¹ These attunements are not ‘merely subjectively coloured experiences or epiphenomenal manifestations of psychological life’ but fundamental modes of being, ‘ways of *Dasein* in which *Dasein* becomes manifest to itself’.⁴² Such powerful habits of feeling shape our perceptions of the world, and Heidegger was concerned with finding a way to make our boredom ‘resonate’ rather than allowing it only to manifest itself ‘*wherever* we create a diversion from boredom for ourselves’.⁴³ This boredom is rooted in an experience of emptiness – what Raposa calls the ‘emptiness of each passing moment, as well as that of the object that confronts us and of the situation that binds us’.⁴⁴ This overpowering feeling, that in boredom ‘we are *bound* precisely by – nothing’,⁴⁵ that is, ‘not bound by time but by the emptiness of *this*

Martin Heidegger, ‘What is Metaphysics?’ in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 87.

³⁹ Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p. 78.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 77-79.

⁴¹ Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*, p. 54.

⁴² Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p. 238.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁴⁴ Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*, p. 55.

⁴⁵ Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p. 97.

time',⁴⁶ becomes clearer in Heidegger's intensification of boredom as more than simply being 'bored by' a particular object or activity. Anxiety and boredom constitute a state of mind that is both a kind of calmness and an uneasiness that 'leaves us hanging, because it induces the slipping away of beings as a whole'.⁴⁷ 'Profound boredom' as a state of detachment and indifference provides a 'vehicle of transcendence'⁴⁸ beyond specific circumstances and particular beings, one which 'manifests being as a whole'. This reading of boredom as a state in which we might be open to the demand of Being has been challenged by Jean-Luc Marion, who points out that it is more likely that it is a state in which we are unable to say anything at all, in which every call or claim (including that of Being itself) is disqualified: 'boredom does not evaluate, does not affirm, does not love'.⁴⁹ Indeed, the only other possibility of such revelation, Heidegger concedes, is 'the joy we feel in the presence of the Dasein ... of a human being whom we love'.⁵⁰

The Bored Animal

One should then ask the question of whether boredom is 'affect' or 'affect-lessness'. These preoccupations testify to 'being-left-empty as the essential experience of

⁴⁶ Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*, p. 55 (emphasis in the original).

⁴⁷ Heidegger, 'What is Metaphysics?' p. 88.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 57.

⁴⁹ Jean-Luc Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), p. 190. For an incisive critical discussion of Marion, see Joeri Schrijvers, *Ontotheological Turnings: The Decentering of the Modern Subject in Recent French Phenomenology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), pp. 159-178.

⁵⁰ Martin Heidegger, 'What is Metaphysics?' p. 87.

boredom’⁵¹ and Giorgio Agamben’s own reading of Heidegger (developing the notion of ‘profound boredom’ [*tiefe Langeweile*]) assigns it the privileged role of ‘metaphysical operator’⁵² in the anthropological ‘machine’ which produces – and thereby separates – humanity from animality.⁵³ Boredom is the keynote of ‘anthropogenesis, the becoming Da-sein of living man’⁵⁴ suspending its animal captivation with its habitual stimuli (what Agamben calls the ‘carriers of significance which constitute its environment’⁵⁵). ‘Dasein,’ concludes Agamben ‘is simply an animal that has learned to become bored’.⁵⁶ What separates us from the animals is our awareness of tedium, both the tedium of having nothing particular to occupy us, and the tediousness of what does, and which might enable us, however briefly, to forget how much we are restrained by our habits. Boredom exposes ‘the unexpected proximity of Dasein and the animal’⁵⁷: both are ‘open to a closedness ... totally delivered over to something that obstinately refuses itself’⁵⁸; nonetheless this non-relation ultimately leads to an estrangement from our

⁵¹ Agamben, *The Open*, p. 64.

⁵² Ibid., p. 68.

⁵³ In *Animal boredom: towards an empirical approach of animal subjectivity* (Leiden, 1993), François Wemelsfelder offers an account from the perspective of physical sciences (although one still drawing upon Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty), suggesting that animals and humans participate in a common pre-reflective environment [*Umwelt*].

⁵⁴ Agamben, *The Open*, p. 68.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 41.

⁵⁶ ‘... it has awakened *from* its own captivation *to* its own captivation. This awakening of the living being to its own being-captivated, this anxious and resolute opening to a not-open, is the human.’ Ibid., p. 70.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 65.

⁵⁸ ‘In boredom, Dasein can be riveted to beings that refuse themselves in their totality because it is constitutively “delivered up” [*überantwortet*] to its own proper being,” factually “thrown” and “lost” in

environment.⁵⁹ And yet this anthropology remains incoherent: disaffection is not simply the absence of affection. It has an object: people are disaffected *with* something or *by* something; in this sense, as we shall note later on, it has the same structure as fatigue. While Agamben's 'weak messianicity' articulates an 'ontology of potentiality', fatigue – to which we now turn – remains a neglected theme of Agamben's post human biopolitics.⁶⁰

The Phenomenology of Fatigue

Chretien's thesis is simple: 'ever since we came into the world we have always found (or lost) ourselves in this familiar but immemorial ordeal'.⁶¹ We are tested by fatigue, in one or other of its many forms, every day. Fatigue is a constant part of the fabric of human lives and accompanies all of its activities: exhaustion represents an extreme form of fatigue, intelligible only according to that tiredness of which one has prior experience. It is, therefore, a sign of solidarity, the condition of our living and our humanity; experienced [*donné*] as both indivisible and yet infinitely varied: 'even if philosophical analysis⁶² could distinguish (or even resist) the fatigue of the body and lassitude of the soul, that is not for us the beginning of the fatigue ... which weighs upon

the world of its concern ... *In becoming bored, Dasein is delivered over (ausgeliefert) to something that refuses itself, exactly as the animal, in its captivation, is exposed (hinausgesetzt) in something unrevealed.*' Agamben, *The Open*, p. 65 (emphasis in original).

⁵⁹ The 'jewel ... at the center of the human world ... is nothing but animal captivation'. Ibid., p.68.

⁶⁰ Neither *Homo Sacer*, *The Open* or *Means without End* make any reference to fatigue.

⁶¹ Chretien, *De La Fatigue*, p. 9.

⁶² Lacoste himself describes the task of the philosopher as 'that of an ascetic ... but this work has nothing to do with that of the manual worker or servant.' Lacoste, *Présence et parousie*, p. 310.

our actions, our feet and our faces, nor the sheer physical effort that plunges us into some stupor or bewilderment.’⁶³

Since fatigue thus lies in the background of every activity, it is there in idleness too (one can get tired of doing nothing – ‘each act has its own fatigue’). Chretien’s genealogical investigation asks whether it is always the *same* tiredness, or does it have a history, even a destiny? Is the history of fatigue, in fact, not the history of the body? It is one of the most humane, common and enduring experiences; intimate, unspectacular and unobjectifiable, present at the heart of each human life, affecting both body and soul. But, according to Lacoste, the marks of fatigue upon the body remind us that it is also a self. And with this in mind, one can understand the philosophical meaning of fatigue. Whenever someone says that they are tired they do not mean that their body is tired,⁶⁴ or that certain physical-chemical processes have tired them: they mean that, above all, fatigue has an egological reality. Now, this does not mean that animals are never tired, nor does it suggest that they have an ego; it simply reminds us that once again consciousness and the body are inseparable.⁶⁵ Indeed, for Lacoste, dreamless sleep reveals the irreducible animality of human life.⁶⁶

Boredom and Life

⁶³ Chrétien, *De La Fatigue*, p. 9.

⁶⁴ Of course one might ‘challenge the impression that being must be either actively engaged in what Levinas calls “effort” or else in some state of deceleration or decline. This division seems to overlook the humble experience of *leisure*, of being at one’s ease.’ Bloechl, ‘The difficulty of being’, p. 85. Cf. Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Le monde et l’absence d’œuvre* (Paris: PUF, 2000), pp. 18-21.

⁶⁵ Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Etre-en-Danger* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2011), p. 243.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

Phenomenology maintains that ‘things are endowed with meaning and value only through the comportment adopted toward them and in accordance with how such things appear to the subject.’⁶⁷ One should ask then what the significance of boredom and fatigue is.

Merleau-Ponty, who like Husserl understood the importance of embodiment,⁶⁸ contended that attentiveness was crucial to consciousness.⁶⁹ On the other hand, in examining our affective lives Lacoste wishes to preserve the ‘formal plurality’ in which the world appears including inattentiveness, disappointment and boredom. Like Gethsemane, there should be no time for boredom: the *desideratum* (longing) for God supersedes the sort of temporary ‘micro-eschatology’⁷⁰ of peace or the rest that Levinas

⁶⁷ Jean-Luc Petit, ‘Constitution by movement: Husserl in light of recent neurobiological findings’ in Jean Petitot (ed.), *Naturalizing Phenomenology: Issues in contemporary phenomenology and cognitive science* (Stanford, 1999), p. 221.

⁶⁸ Our bodies are ‘given as the constant bearer of the center of orientation’. Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, (Collected Works Vol. 3) trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1989), p. 70.

⁶⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 30.

⁷⁰ Lacoste (here borrowing a term from Richard Kearney), *Etre-en-Danger*, p. 283. See: Richard Kearney ‘Epiphanies of the Everyday: Toward a Micro-Eschatology’, in *After God: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy*, ed. John Panteleimon Manoussakis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), pp. 3-20.

found somewhat ridiculous.⁷¹ Nonetheless, this play between rest and restlessness is one of our most commonplace experiences.

In his own analysis of the affective life, Lacoste states unequivocally that ‘the experience of fatigue ... is not pathological: a tired person is not a sick person (even if the distinction is often not that clear).’⁷² Often ‘[f]atigue is defined as failure’ when I cannot read or pay attention to whatever I am supposed to be listening to. Fatigue can be described in terms of opening and closing: openness, because it is ‘my exposure to certain things or events in the world which tires me’; closure, because it is ‘the refusal of that opening that is called fatigue’. One of the purest examples of fatigue, offered by Lacoste, is the desire to sleep: ‘if not for fatigue I would be dead to the world ... In such a case, *I* would be tired. But the world would be only incidental for exhaustion ... [nevertheless] it is the same world which appears to me in my tired state as in ... my rested or relaxed state.’⁷³ Fatigue and boredom thereby reveal the incipient structuralism of daily life; fatigue has directionality:

I am of course tired of this or that, of having read the *Critique of Pure Reason* or having had too long a hike,⁷⁴ but the tiring thing (or tiring action) has the remarkable phenomenological property of affecting every other occurrence. The *Critique of Pure Reason* tires me. But during

⁷¹ ‘Mortality renders senseless any concern that the ego would have for its existence and its destiny ... nothing is more comical than the concern that a being has for an existence that it could not save from its destruction’. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2002), pp. 128-9.

⁷² Lacoste, *Présence et parousie*, p. 310.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

⁷⁴ Lacoste may here be making an implicit reference to Jean-Paul Sartre’s own discussion in *Being and Nothingness: An Essay On Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 454-5.

the act when it tires me (and, of course, in that act alone – I will always be able to do something different and allow the world to appear to me differently), it is the whole world, in its totality – and this is the important point – which tires me.⁷⁵

It is axiomatic that '[t]he experience of fatigue is the daily bread of prayer': the spiritual life represents a costly break in our *being-in-the-world*. So is fatigue simply 'a reclamation of man' by the secular world? Lacoste admits that we might easily believe that – after all, it is not necessary for us to be tired to discover that prayer is difficult. The place which defines us does not necessarily include any *ad esse Deum* ('being towards God') but it does unfold as corporeality, as flesh and spirit, and this corporeity is characterized as a closure on itself as much as by its openness to the world. This closure might be the autonomy [*adséité*] of the transcendental ego or it may be the tension between the pray-er [*orant*] to cope with their 'thoughts', the *logismoi* of the ascetic tradition. Whichever it is, it is important that we can name this 'heaviness' or 'embarrassment',⁷⁶ and the two experiences – of prayer and of fatigue – 'should be linked ... in order to better illumine this relationship'.⁷⁷ In other words, '[w]e must learn to pray in times of fatigue ... It is especially important – and this is where our emphasis should focus – to learn that it is in time of fatigue that we really pray'.⁷⁸

Fatigue characterizes the dispossession of the self when subjectivity is bracketed out in and by the world. And yet, fatigue presents obstacles: 'The heavy gestures of he

⁷⁵ Lacoste, *Présence et parousie*, p. 311.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 315-6.

⁷⁷ 'By "prayer", we understand a way of life/existence (if we take "life/existence" within its current Kierkegaardian meaning), or more-than-existence (if we take "life" in the sense of Heideggerian analytic), being before God, *esse coram Deo*.' *Ibid.* p. 314.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

who is not master of his own body. The voice that stumbles over its words. And other mundane realities. But there is more. It follows that the body is too tired to pray “well”.⁷⁹

Nihilism and Affection

For Friedrich Nietzsche such fatigue and exhaustion were the chief exports and essential characteristics of the Christian faith,⁸⁰ so much so that the highest goal of Europeans was ‘wakefulness itself’.⁸¹ The ‘will-to-power’ thus represented an epistemological principle whereby Nietzsche intended to ‘construct a philosophy consistent with the extraordinary openness he felt was available to man’⁸² in opposition to the ‘transcendental nihilistic fatigue’ of which Christianity was merely the most radical form.⁸³

But, contends Levinas, the subject cannot be described merely on the basis of intentionality, freedom and will; it has to be described on ‘the basis of the passivity of time’.⁸⁴ The patience of ageing is ‘not a position taken with regard to one’s death, but a lassitude, a passive exposure to being which is not assumed ... that peculiar “being too much” which is also a failing but in a deficiency in which the *conatus* (impulse) is not relaxed’. Moreover, the non-repose or restlessness of the ethical concern implicit in

⁷⁹ Lacoste, *Présence et parousie*, p. 315.

⁸⁰ Chrétien, *De la fatigue*, p. 137.

⁸¹ Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. J. Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 4.

⁸² Arthur C. Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 12.

⁸³ Chrétien, *De la fatigue*, pp. 136-138.

⁸⁴ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 53.

‘being for another’ is ‘better than rest’ and ‘bears witness to the Good’.⁸⁵ However, Lacoste reminds us that since nothing is given to us without first being reduced to that which we can receive of that gift, then being is constantly in danger: ‘A human being is flesh and body, and this duality puts it in danger of being treated merely as a body: for instance, the surgeon is only concerned with a body, the flesh being somehow anesthetized – he would operate on an animal in the same way’.⁸⁶ Thus, as well as letting things appear ‘we can also allow [them] to disappear. Reduced to an object by distractions, the work of art disappears. Reduced to a body, the anesthetized flesh disappears. Our being-at-rest disappears when we find ourselves without a place in the world’.⁸⁷ Nihilism – in its reduction of truth⁸⁸ to the will-to-power – diminishes the importance of place. Lacoste invites us to rethink our humanity by refiguring place, and how our comportment as ‘liturgical beings’ – beings before God⁸⁹ – might exceed our being in the world.

The simple thesis behind Henri de Lubac’s *Surnaturel* was that Enlightenment modernity was the product of a neoscholastic theology which overlooked humanity’s natural desire for God leading to ‘a conception of grace as something so totally extraneous and alien to human nature that anything and everything natural and human was downgraded and demeaned’.⁹⁰ That meant that human nature – including reason,

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 54.

⁸⁶ Lacoste, *Etre-en-Danger*, p. 7.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 316.

⁸⁸ Being-at-rest, Lacoste suggests, conveys one of ‘the truths of the world’. *Présence et parousie*, p. 316.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 314.

⁹⁰ Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), p. 74.

feeling, and the body – became ‘temptingly easy to denigrate’.⁹¹ Lacoste concedes that the concept of ‘pure nature’ probably ‘died from the rebuttal inflicted upon it by Lubac’.⁹² But does that mean that it became merely a chapter in the history of theological nonsense with nothing to tell us? According to Lacoste, the history of modern philosophy will, in fact, turn out to be nothing more than the history of philosophers’ inability ‘to grasp an object (the humanity of mankind⁹³) that “natural reason” is, in principle, sufficient to grasp’.⁹⁴ The idea of a pure nature – with all its attendant epistemological implications – is a modern hypothesis, a product of the division of theology and philosophy into ‘separate bodies’.

Lacoste’s own phenomenological analysis is interested in the margins of language, what he calls ‘the pre-discursive gift of the world to the self’⁹⁵. This priority of the affective-corporeal dimension involves a privileging of the corporeal and topological register of experience as offering possibilities of human freedom that precede and exceed the merely conceptual or discursive. This represents a freedom from ontotheological language, a freedom in which human subjectivity is revealed as much at the level of passive syntheses such as disappointment or frustration as the perceptive life of which they are a part. These affections may overwhelm our perceptive life: when something appears to us, it is given to be both seen and felt (sensory *hulè* and intentional *morphé*) and the joy of seeing (or feeling) is all part of the composition of

⁹¹ Kerr, *Catholic Theologians*, pp. 74-5.

⁹² Lacoste, *Le monde et l’absence d’œuvre*, p. 26.

⁹³ The ‘strangest of beings’ one whose ‘strangeness is that of a pure enigma’ and yet sustains ‘a cognitive discourse ... about what we are here and now.’ Ibid., p. 45.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 32.

⁹⁵ Lacoste, *Présence et Parousie*, p. 117.

that experience. That something affects us, which means that it is *present* to us. Yet, while we are enjoying its presence, tiredness overcomes us – that something is still there and is still perceived, but it is no longer *present*. And nothing is more common, Lacoste suggests, ‘than to allow oneself to invest in a presence, only to let that which was present to then absent itself’.⁹⁶

This affective flux not only recalls Heidegger’s emphasis on the pre-reflective dimension of existence but is, in part, reminiscent of Lubac’s own claim that our minds rest on a certain ‘anticipation’, or *prolepsis*⁹⁷ that there is a truth ‘which is lived before it is known, perceived with certainty before being subjected to the discipline of proofs and the control of concepts – because it is connatural to us’.⁹⁸ And as Levinas observes, ‘human labor and effort presuppose a commitment in which we already involved’.⁹⁹ But while the non-appearing divine may be perceptible through an affective act of mediation,¹⁰⁰ the *orant* still risks boredom. Regardless of any proleptic, eschatology reminds us that God (or the Absolute) cannot easily be brought to mind in prayer, which may be destined only to be frustrated. Lacoste wishes simply to articulate ‘a possibility of a beyond-the-world in which nothing could be reduced to an object, in which flesh

⁹⁶ Lacoste, *Etre-en-Danger*, p. 51.

⁹⁷ ‘God must be present to the mind before any explicit reasoning or objective concept is possible ... he must be secretly affirmed and thought’. Henri de Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, trans. Alexander Dru (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1960), p. 58.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁹⁹ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 19.

¹⁰⁰ The idea of God ‘prior to our concepts, although beyond our grasp without their help, and prior to all our argumentation, in spite of being logically unjustifiable without them ... is the inspiration, the motive power and justification of them all.’ Lubac, *Discovery of God*, p. 43.

could be bracketed out to the benefit of the body, a world beyond, therefore, in which being would not be being-in-danger. Such eschatology is a possibility, and thus not necessarily wishful thinking'.¹⁰¹

Boredom thus provides a measure of how liturgical experience is, above all, a non-experience (one that undermines conventional accounts of 'religious experience' since Schleiermacher), that cannot be prescribed, rooted in something besides the intentionality of consciousness. Despite the claims of certain theological texts,¹⁰² Lacoste maintains, it is impossible to apprehend God via an act of the will or the intellect, here recalling Schelling and Kierkegaard, philosophers who transgressed the border between philosophical and theological reason in favour of a rationality that bypassed the opposition of natural and the supernatural in the interest of a vision of human freedom. But while philosophy can be concerned with human happiness it does not follow that it possesses the necessary conditions for beatitude; although most claim to understand 'well-being', Lacoste notes wryly that philosophies such as logical positivism do not present themselves as lifestyles.¹⁰³ And it remains fascinated by happiness even when this 'well-being' no longer has a divine warrant once philosophy asserts – following Nietzsche – that God is dead. As an example of this 'right to the philosophical life', Lacoste suggests Heidegger's notion of 'serenity'¹⁰⁴ in which human beings enjoy everything that is their due, untroubled by anything that might exceed their 'ontological requirements'. This existential logic is thus one of satiety: humanity's desire can be filled because it lives in an intelligible world. And because it wants to

¹⁰¹ Lacoste, *Etre-en-Danger*, p. 8.

¹⁰² Lacoste, *Le monde et l'absence d'œuvre*, p. 33.

¹⁰³ '...nor do they claim for the philosopher the privilege of living life itself.' Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 44.

achieve those goals it has given itself the power to do so; the figure of the will which creates that power has its own name: the will-to-power, in reality a closed human experience.

This will-to-power was an ‘all inclusive principle for Nietzsche’,¹⁰⁵ encompassing ontology, axiology, anthropology and epistemology. So, does the split between philosophy and theology (with its concomitant theory of ‘pure nature’) leave humanity ‘helpless before the disturbing reality of nihilism’?¹⁰⁶ Although he never discussed human nature, Heidegger outlined the conditions for a possible happiness on a godforsaken earth. And, Lacoste continues, it was a quote from Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* which provided the inspiration for his essay ‘What is thinking?’¹⁰⁷ Thinking should oppose the growth of that Nietzschean desert. But what is thinking? For Heidegger it involved tracing the links between thinking, building and living, between thinking and our physical contact with the country lanes along which we (if not necessarily Sartre¹⁰⁸) walk. But such things do not engender hope.¹⁰⁹ And for Lacoste, the Hegelian ‘God’ died because it deprived humanity of hope.

What is at stake in Nietzsche is, Lacoste suggests, a direct consequence of Hegelian eschatology. While Nietzsche cared little for either Hegel or his ‘Swabian

¹⁰⁵ Ammar Zeifa, ‘Le Nihilisme et l’Épuisement: Heidegger ou Nietzsche’ in *Phénoménologie des sentiments corporels*, p. 128.

¹⁰⁶ Lacoste, *Le monde et l’absence d’œuvre*, p. 34.

¹⁰⁷ ‘The desert grows: woe him who harbours deserts!’ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, eds. Adrian Del Caro and Robert B. Pippin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 252.

¹⁰⁸ See footnote 73 above.

¹⁰⁹ Lacoste, *Le monde et l’absence d’œuvre*, p. 42.

piety',¹¹⁰ the affirmation of the 'eternal return of the same' is his response to Hegelian idealism. Following the death of God:

life wants to survive, and survive through the work of a will to power to create new values. But ... the work of the will to power is an endless task: at a time without end and without purpose, eternal and folded in on itself. The will to power can never pronounce its last word. It can never lead itself to a final experience. It must assert itself with joy.¹¹¹

Although it offers us a future, the truth of its being resides in the present – the will-to-power is founded on neither promise nor hope. Moreover, eschatologies which survive the death of God cannot resist the endless claims of the will-to-power.¹¹² This absolute future has its own name: the advent of the *Übermensch*, an early attempt to overcome metaphysics – that is, to overcome humanity [*dépasser l'homme*¹¹³] as a metaphysical animal. And history has made us understandably cautious about that so-called 'eschatology'.

Christian theology is, on the other hand, defined by its refusal of any quantifiable eschatology. Every other end, however enviable and respectable it might be, cannot claim anything more than the status of a 'penultimate end': 'Nothing that the

¹¹⁰ Lacoste reminds us of Nietzsche's disdain for Hegel's '*gothische Himmelstürmerei*'. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente: Frühjahr bis Herbst 1884* (Nietzsche Werke VII/2), eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1974), p. 251.

¹¹¹ Lacoste, *Le monde et l'absence d'œuvre*, p. 41.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 43.

¹¹³ On this and the relationship between the so-called 'new atheism' and natural beatitude see Rémi Brague, *Les ancres dans le Ciel: L'infrastructure métaphysique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2011), pp. 77, 110.

world is home to is eschatologically *simpliciter*'.¹¹⁴ And because de Lubac never pretended to describe 'the current conditions of this existence', the theologoumenon he rehabilitated leaves the Heideggerian hermeneutics of facticity intact. Is, Lacoste asks, the longing for the eschaton – understood as consciousness-of-desire – really an eschatological event? Is the fate of the *desideratum* to pass incognito among the conditions – such as boredom and fatigue – that being-in-the-world dictates to experience?

As someone associated with the post-metaphysical 'theological turn' in phenomenology, Lacoste is unlikely to assign, as Agamben does, any one thing the status of a metaphysical operator; he wishes simply to preserve the 'formal plurality',¹¹⁵ in which the world appears. Here phenomena (particularly 'irregular' ones such as religious phenomena) are either dissolved or subsumed under metaphysical categories; the doctrine of pure reason, in its level of abstraction and iterability, ultimately reduces humanity to the level of the herd, without a place in the world and susceptible to domination by the will-to-power. In the experience of fatigue, in fact, 'one must trace a link from myself to the world or abandon any attempt at explanation',¹¹⁶ and we 'must therefore speak of the world and about fatigue, just as we talk about a world of anguish or joy'.¹¹⁷ Christianity, which negotiated the apparent scandal posed by the non-

¹¹⁴ 'Only those realities of which the kingdom of God provides the conceptual figure, and for which the resurrection of the flesh (with its corollary in the "beatific vision") provides the hermeneutic principle.' Lacoste, *Le monde et l'absence d'œuvre*, p. 35.

¹¹⁵ 'The world always appears to us in the formal plurality of worlds, among them the world of fatigue.' Lacoste, *Présence et parousie*, p. 312.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 311.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 312.

realization of its *eschaton*, ‘has precisely the ability to teach humanity how to exist without drama ... in an accomplished history, devoid of ontophanic and onto poetic promises’.¹¹⁸ This existence is typically characterised as vigil.

Vigil and Sleep

Although Nietzsche counselled ‘wakefulness’¹¹⁹, vigil usually has a specific religious significance. A self-declared follower of John of the Cross,¹²⁰ Lacoste draws upon an important liturgical register of ‘night and vigil’.¹²¹ Human beings live by day and by night. Although sleep, ‘from which the freedom and the intentional acts of consciousness are absent, is not a part of life where we manifest who we are’ this ‘lesser mode of existence during the hours we devote to purely physiological operations is nevertheless essential to what we are’.¹²² Only angels ignore sleep – Lacoste reminds us

¹¹⁸ Able to ‘cope without investing new messianic hopes in the future’. Lacoste, *Le monde et l’absence d’œuvre*, p. 38.

¹¹⁹ William Desmond notes the paradoxical ‘hypnotizing effect ... marvellous to behold’ that Nietzsche has had on ‘some of the better minds of the last century’, charming us ‘with the belief that at last we are waking up and no longer asleep in the nightmares of the millennia’. William Desmond, *Is There A Sabbath For Thought? Between Religion and Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 204.

¹²⁰ Jean-Yves Lacoste, ‘Perception, Transcendence and the Experience of God’, trans. Aaron Patrick Riches, in Conor Cunningham and Peter Candler, (eds.), *Transcendence and Phenomenology* (London: SCM Press, 2007): p. 14.

¹²¹ Cf. The ‘saved night’ in Agamben, *The Open*, p. 82.

¹²² Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*, trans. Mark Rafferty-Skehan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), p. 78.

that the Aramaic name for angel is “one who keeps vigil” [“*veilleur*”].¹²³ But vigil is not our perpetual mode of consciousness: keeping vigil; and sleep, as being-*less* and as indicative of being-*less* in general reminds us that we are not masters of ourselves: “life,” in this case, has power over “existence.” What, then, asks Lacoste, makes someone forego sleep so as to gain time for the vigil? It is a question of the victorious protest of ‘existence’ against ‘life’. Life precedes our existence in the world.¹²⁴

The animal can suffer sleepless nights or stay awake simply because it is hungry or afraid (and human beings can certainly remain awake for the same reasons). But, notes Lacoste, there would no sense in saying that an animal is capable of keeping vigil: ‘keeping vigil cannot be the object of an obligation; it is something that can only be the object of a *desideratum*. The philosophical importance of the question should not make us forget that we do not necessarily invest ourselves in the vigil for the most laudable reasons: though we see nothing but futility in his actions, the reveler [*fêtarde*] also keeps vigil’.¹²⁵

In struggling to ‘exist’ a little longer ‘the time of vigil is truly our time ... time which we gain at the expense of ... pure biological necessities’; that is, beyond the ontological satisfaction of serenity. And although we are not accountable to any authority for this time, even our rest has a political dimension:

¹²³ Lacoste wishes to determine the ‘affirmative practice represented by the liturgy’ by specifying ‘a new register’ in which its symbolic place lies: ‘in the night and the vigil.’ Ibid., p. 78. ‘[O]ne might be justified in affirming that the attention that he devotes to and his expectation of God symbolically assume the nocturnal character of the vigil in which, every ethical duty having been honored, man gives to the Absolute the time (and thus the being) which he might otherwise have given to sleep.’

¹²⁴ Lacoste, *Présence et parousie*, p. 163.

¹²⁵ Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute*, p. 79

To deliberately deprive me of sleep, or of the sleep necessary to my good health, would be tantamount to abuse; I have the right to expect that the state or the company, except in cases of emergency, leave me sufficient time to sleep. The act of keeping vigil appears to us then as the purest form of the self positing itself, as the epitome of an affirmation of our freedom.¹²⁶

In its decentring of human subjectivity, liturgical time is diverted time (a time of inoperativity, time ‘given over’). Boredom, *pace* Heidegger, reveals that this time can also be experienced as wasted time: impatience reappears, wishing to put an end to this dead time [*temps mort*] (to devote it, Lacoste notes sardonically, to ‘an indisputably more “interesting” activity, such as theological work’¹²⁷). The bored consciousness wastes its time. It might compensate for this wasted time and transform the dialogue it would like to establish with God into a soliloquy and thereby retake possession of this time.¹²⁸ This phenomenology of the liturgy suggests that boredom might be a principal mood of nocturnal experience. Can man become bored with facing God? As provocative as that may seem, the answer must be yes. It would ‘be contradictory for man to be completely eschatologically satisfied with the Absolute’.¹²⁹ The nocturnal nonexperience is, however, not eschatological and by ‘precariously distancing himself from history, the man who prays signifies and anticipates the accomplishment of this history.’¹³⁰

¹²⁶ ‘Once our inevitable allocation of work, whose distribution is necessary, foreseeable and commonplace, has been completed, and proves that we remain in possession of a fundamental right: that of proving, by the content we give to our vigil (which we can spend doing philosophy, writing poetry, or praying – and many other things besides), the surplus of meaning we give to our humanity.’ Ibid., p. 79.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 149.

¹²⁸ Ibid., pp. 148-9.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 148.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 78.

Since God is ‘always greater’ [*Deus semper maior*] and resists conceptualisation, the act of ‘making oneself present’ that inaugurates liturgy cannot help being affected by the distance which remains between God (or the Absolute) and whoever prays. Liturgical experience is by no means ecstatic.¹³¹ As Lacoste argues, ‘[i]nexperience has no hold over knowledge’ and actually permits its rationality – that of Schelling and Kierkegaard – to unfold ‘while contradistinguishing itself as clearly as possible from religious emotionalism’.¹³² Nonetheless, it does exert a hold over the present, which is therefore not structured primarily by the impatient expectation of some promised *parousia*, or an earthly satisfaction which it has promised itself. Instead, as a work of an *ascesis* (of making oneself present and waiting), one might well understand that this time can be one of *theologically* profound boredom.¹³³

Conclusion: The Eschatological Consummation of Fatigue

Theological reflection upon boredom and fatigue represents a call to impurity:¹³⁴ an end, perhaps, to the distinctions between faith and reason, mind and body, and the debate over an elusive ‘pure nature’. It is also recognition of a certain porosity between theology and philosophy, at least in the continental tradition.

It is also an affirmation of life: in contradistinction to Agamben, these are not the non-states prior to some unspecified captivation scheduled to be overcome in the post-human condition – they are basic and constant conditions of humanity. Subjected

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 26.

¹³² Ibid., p. 148.

¹³³ Fatigue demonstrates that ‘the logic of work is not the most human of logics’. Lacoste, *Présence et parousie*, p. 320.

¹³⁴ Cf. Espen Dahl’s comments on Radical Orthodoxy in *Phenomenology and the Holy: Religious Experience After Husserl* (London: SCM Press, 2010), pp. 266-268.

to proper philosophical and theological reflection, boredom and fatigue may offer a reparative to the reduction of humanity to animality, to nothing more than a herd mentality at risk of being dominated by the will-to-power. For phenomenology, the human form is the foundation of the world's meaning; for theology, the embodiment of God (in the Incarnation) is the basis of the moral and physical integrity of those bodies, whose meaning resides in their being in the image of Christ.¹³⁵ Lacoste's own post-Heideggerian analysis suggests that – as Barth suggested – boredom is theologically constitutive of any coherent anthropology.

In his recent enquiry into '*God and Being*', George Pattison makes the suggestion that possibility represents 'a kind of trace of non-being within Being, the index of a given entity's mutability and corruptibility and, since possibility is a feature of the sublunary world in general, a marker of the world's falling-short of true Being'.¹³⁶ Thus conceived, the phenomenological attention that boredom and nihilism receive is due to their capacity to reveal the negative potential of possibility. Unlike his friend Jean-Luc Marion – who remains a philosopher of experience, and therefore closer to Maurice Blanchot (who writes, like Marion, of an excess of experience) – Lacoste treats religious phenomena as (potentially) *inexperienced*: 'It is not necessary for a presence to be total for it to delight us ... it can happen that anyone or anything that delighted us yesterday bores us today (as the angels themselves, according to Origen,

¹³⁵ Cf. Stephen H. Webb, *Jesus Christ, Eternal God: Heavenly Flesh and the Metaphysics of Matter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹³⁶ George Pattison, *God and Being: An Enquiry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 295.

were capable of being bored by the presence of God)' .¹³⁷

This not only remains truer to the day-to-day experiences of so many believers (phenomenologically speaking there is no difference between a congregation after a church service than before; indeed, as Lacoste has shown, the most profound mood of liturgy is probably boredom) but it allows (liturgical) revelation more room than what has already been specified by phenomenology. Michel Henry (another philosopher for whom life was pre-eminent) and Lacoste both agree that humanity is not fully explicable in terms of worldliness, and wish to construe the human being as one that exceeds the strictures of Being-in-the-world. However, unlike Henry, Lacoste insists that as flesh and blood humanity never is completely free from the strictures of Being-in-the-world. Here rest and sleep are more than physical necessities; however provisional or marginal,¹³⁸ they represent micro-eschatologies of the kingdom or a fleeting 'taste',¹³⁹ of happiness to come, brief pauses in a life of vigil.

¹³⁷ Jean-Yves Lacoste, 'The Phenomenality of Anticipation', trans. Ronald Mendoza-De Jesús and Neal DeRoo, in Neal DeRoo and John Panteleimon Manoussakis (eds.), *Phenomenology and Eschatology: Not Yet in the Now* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 26.

¹³⁸ Lacoste, *Présence et parousie*, p. 320.

¹³⁹ Lacoste, *Le monde et l'absence d'œuvre*, p. 22.